

The University of Chicago

SOCIOLOGICAL BEHAVIORISM AND
RELIGIOUS PERSONALITY

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

JUNE, 1941

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W. BARNETT BLAKEMORE

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G. H. Mead agrees with John Dewey's assertion that the individual is a reconstructive center in society, and his constant awareness of this fact is adequate proof that Mead's sociological behaviorism is not the sociological determinism which many have tried to make of it.¹ The question may well be raised whether Mead himself gave an adequate description of the process of such social reconstruction. But there is no doubt that Mead's terms and notions can be the basis for describing adequately both the way in which such social transformation occurs and the quality of religious personality upon which social redemption depends.

As early as 1903, Mead was describing the area of psychological inquiry as:

. . . . that phase of experience within which we are immediately conscious of conflicting impulses which rob the object of its character as an object-stimulus, leaving us in so far in an attitude of subjectivity; but during which a new object-stimulus appears due to the reconstructive activity which is identified with the subject 'I' as distinct from the object 'me.'²

Here the radical difference between Mead's sociological behaviorism and J. B. Watson's behaviorism is indicated. For Mead included under the category of behavior (or the "act") not only the bodily motions countenanced by Watson, but also thinking and prior attitudes which are experientially accessible only to the experimenter.³ This essentially private area was, according to Mead, the peculiar area of the psychical. In this definition, Mead differs markedly from most of the psychologists contemporary with him, and certainly from that narrow objectivity of the early

¹C. W. Morris, "Introduction" to G. H. Mead, Mind, Self, and Society (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), p. xxvii.

²G. H. Mead, "The Definition of the Psychical," Decennial Publications III, The University of Chicago (1903), p. 112.

³G. H. Mead, Mind, Self, and Society, p. 4.

psychology of religion which eschewed all traffic with experiences and objects not commonly observable. Upon the importance of this area of private, subjective, and solitary experience, the critics of "psychologism" have based their attacks, insisting that an "objective approach" which cannot describe this area is unable to comprehend the "decisive" factor in human personality. But Mead's terms "I" and "me" give us a heretofore ignored entrance for the empirical study of this inner area.

Two of the germinal notions in Mead's thought need to be mentioned. The first is that activity plays a part in the acquiring of knowledge. This is meant both in the French sense of the dependence of conscience upon mouvement,⁴ and in the instrumentalist sense that the search for knowledge arises to release inhibited action. The second notion, that the gesture is the element of communication, came from Wilhelm Wundt. Mead shows that the gesture becomes a significant symbol when it arouses in the gesturing individual the same idea that it arouses in the one gestured at. Mead further shows that, whatever earlier factors there are in "mind," it does not appear until the individual has adopted some significant symbols. Mind is the product of language, not language of mind, is Mead's most important insight. It is also the significant symbols which make possible that "taking the role of the other" by which the individual gains a notion of his own "self." Like "mind," the "self" has some bases which antedate the symbols, but it has no "form" until the individual, by means of symbols, can conceive the object "me." Mead distinguished between the "I" and the "me" by means of memory. The "I" is the immediately active self which can never be known until, after action, the memory recalls it as the "me." By virtue of the store of significant symbols and their meanings which the individual inherits from his social milieu, the "me" is given social status in terms of which it seeks to control the "I." But the "I" preserves an ineradicable spontaneity which makes it the source of novelty in human experience but keeps it also unpredictable. The "I" is also the source of the sense of responsibility for one's own acts

⁴Gabriel Madinier, Conscience et mouvement (Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1938), especially chaps. I and III; G. H. Mead, Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1936), p. 435.

in the sense that "I" know what "I" did. The "I" knows "me," but the "me" never knows the "I."

The distinction between the "I" and the "me" can also be demonstrated by referring to the tenses of "I am." In contrast to the immediacy of the "I," the "me" includes references to the past (I was, I have been), references to the future (I will be, I will have been), and even references to the conditional aspects of life (I might have been, I would have been, I will be if . . .). It is the "I will be"--an imaginary projection of the self as acceptable to the society to which I wish to belong--that gives the individual a grasp upon the future and is important for the understanding of religious personality. Mead himself has no term by which the "decisive" aspect of the "I will be" can be discussed. Since the notion of "decision" has become important in modern theology, there must be found some correlative term which will formally integrate with Mead's and Dewey's insights regarding the social origins of personality.

Such a term is "the wish," retrieved from E. B. Holt's treatise of twenty-five years ago: The Freudian Wish. Holt unfortunately coupled the wish with the reflex-arc which was then supposed to be an adequate basis for the description of human behavior. The wish, said Holt, was the organization of reflexes into a specific response.⁵ Our own definition of the wish is that it is the individual's specific response to general inner impulses and outer conditions. The wish does not necessarily appear as such consciously, but it can be read into behavior, even into past behavior, as a determining factor of any particular action--an assumption which has been basic in most psycho-analytical techniques. The significance of the wish is that by means of it the individual finds the specific outlet for whatever impulses and attitudes lie in the primary stages of the act. This quality of human life is best understood in contrast to animal life in which impulses find their expression through specific and specifying instincts. In times of stress, human life cannot fall back upon reflexive instincts to any degree because they have been naturally replaced by a reflective instrument for the formation of wishes.

The wish is further characterized by a content of significant symbols. In the wish, the intellectual, emotional, and voli-

⁵E. B. Holt, The Freudian Wish (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1915), p. vii, chaps. I and II, pp. 153ff.

tional aspects of life are fused into a unity. But the wish cannot be formed apart from the socially-inherited significant symbols and their meanings. That is the source of trouble, for no matter what he wills, the individual can only wish in terms of the concepts endowed upon him by society. To some extent he can decide only as society would have him decide.

This dependence of the individual upon society for a body of significant symbols is only one of the factors which makes the relationship between personality and community the paradoxical one out of which may come a prophetic protest. It is upon society that the individual is dependent for the development of his "mind" and his "self." Society is the matrix in which personality grows. But at the same time, society makes a threefold threat against personality. First, any society tends to force the individual into that routinization which Whitehead has called the god of all organization.⁶ Secondly, as the price of membership within the group, society requires conformity to an approved code. The individual can never match this moral demand with more than a promise that he will restrain the spontaneity of the "I." It is not that the individual wills to be immoral, but, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse, he finds that he has unwittingly overstepped the bounds.

The third threat to personality is glimpsed only if the individual takes the moral demands of society seriously, that is, if he is moral in the social sense. Only the man who accepts as a personal responsibility the task of conforming the "Self" to group demands comes to realize this third threat. Such an individual because of being socialized in the deepest sense is also personalized in the highest degree, and he seeks to develop the most extended possible vision of the "I will be." To such an individual there may come a realization that implicit in present trends there is either personal or group catastrophe. The individual who makes these discoveries may become a religiously prophetic voice. Such an individual is not an "insider with outside experience"; he is an insider who is deeper in than other men.⁷

⁶ A. N. Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), pp. 113f.

⁷ For the development of this notion from two other points of view see A. T. Boisen, The Exploration of the Inner World (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Company, 1936), passim, and A. E.

No better examples of what may occur when high moral sensitivity is aligned with trenchant sociality are to be found than Jeremiah and Paul. Both were men who identified themselves completely with their societies and who strove to fulfil the demands which their groups placed upon them. To both came the vision of destruction and the path for reconstruction. Jeremiah saw the path in terms of the acceptance of personal responsibility for one's own action;⁸ Paul saw it through the realization that what held society together was not the law but some other quality of life which had been demonstrated by Jesus and which Paul called "spirit."

The circumstance which produces a prophet is that he realizes that without organization there can be no human life; yet it is organization which is the greatest threat both to personality and society. Shall the prophet protest in the name of the individual or in the name of a "better" form of society? Either form of protest is fraught with danger and inhibited by difficulties.

The difficulties arise because the prophet cannot warn other men of the wrath to come unless he speaks their language. Here he is faced with two problems. First, his vision may not have come to him in rational symbols. It frequently comes in idioms which the prophet himself does not fully comprehend. By adventuring far into the future and deep into the mores of the group, the prophet has passed the borders of that world which extant terminologies are capable of describing. If he speaks at all

Garvie's distinction between judicial and legislative consciences in The Fatherly Rule of God (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1935), p. 193.

⁸An insight which was rediscovered by Søren Kierkegaard: see his Purity of Heart (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), sec. 13, "Live as an individual." From Kierkegaard the emphasis on responsibility passes into neo-orthodoxy as in Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 73. But there was also a similar "individualism" in Schleiermacher, Soliloquies (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1926), pp. 95-102; see also C. G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1933), pp. 274ff.; John Oman, Grace and Personality (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), pp. 51ff., 103, 203; William Temple, Nature, Man and God (London: Macmillan and Company, 1935), pp. 223-225: "Determinism is . . . implied insult to personality," (p. 225).

it must be in weird, visionary, ecstatic or apocalyptic terms which may be unintelligible to his fellow men. To speak at all means to run the risk of not being understood. Yet, from another standpoint, and this is the reverse and happier side of his second difficulty, the incomprehensibility of what he says may be the prophet's bulwark. For if his message cannot be understood, the prophet has at least the assurance that it will not be misunderstood. His personality may be misunderstood--he may be taken for a madman--but his message is safe from misinterpretation just because it defies, for the time being, all interpretation. The value of this isolation of his message means that it can never be appraised in terms of the present social ideologies. It can neither be misconstrued into a support of the status quo nor is it accessible to defeat by the typical patterns of argument of that day. The message may be ignored, but it cannot be perverted.⁹

This refuge into unintelligibility¹⁰ is one which we Christians must come to understand, not only because it helps us to evaluate spiritism wherever it occurs in Christendom, but because it characterizes our modern life to an amazing extent. In virtually every field of art, unintelligibility has been seized upon as an idiom. The danger of unintelligibility is that it may be used as a refuge from social responsibility, as a defense of sheer individualism. It may also, as it has tended to do in the field of painting, take on national characteristics; that is, various "types of unintelligibility" have arisen within the several nations--the artist adopts that minimal intelligibility. When national feeling runs high, he may emerge from his national unintelligibility into a form of national intelligibility. However, we do find cases in the arts where unintelligibility takes

⁹In this regard it is interesting that in the early and prophetic stages of their careers, neither Kierkegaard nor Schleiermacher was dismayed by the opacity of his writings. Each felt the assurance that those who had lived as trenchantly as he would understand what was meant. Walter Savage Landor seems to have been upheld by a similar assurance, though William Blake, Jeremiah, and Jesus ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?") seem to have suffered intensely because their fellows failed to comprehend them.

¹⁰This term and most of what follows about art are derived from A. E. Rothschild, The Meaning of Unintelligibility in Modern Art (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934); see also the discussion of art in Paul Tillich, The Religious Situation (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932), p. 58.

on a prophetic note.¹¹

Whether he speaks unintelligibly, or whether he runs the risks involved in couching his message in comprehensible symbols, the prophet must decide whether to protest for the individual or for the group: and therein lie the dangers. Within Christianity the protest has frequently come in the name of the individual, a strain of thought found in Protestantism where, combined with delusions regarding the competency of human reason or conscience, it has served to release anarchistic forces into society. On the other hand, to make a protest in the name of some particular form of society--e.g., a "Christian" socialism or Marxism--is to attempt to replace one demonic order of life by another equally demonic which will produce evil when upheld by the delusion that it is "the perfect society." In contrast to the individualistic and collectivistic tendencies in the Christian protest, there stands the appeal in the name of the Kingdom of God, a notion which has been variously interpreted in terms of benevolent despotism, paternalistic patriarchalism, and democracy. If the unity of these various interpretations can be quickly indicated, it is that the Kingdom has stood as the symbol of a community characterized by a dynamic relationship of mutual concern between the individual and the group. It is with the assurance that the beloved community is real, and that from within it his message is comprehensible, that the prophet speaks. The prophet does become comprehensible, but not because the Kingdom of God is realized. Why is it that the prophet can speak unintelligibly in one generation and be comprehended in the next? Upon what quality of our natural life does this comprehensibility arise?

The religious protest, once made, must depend on some level of life which is more fundamental than the organizational structure which we know. Yet it must also be a communal level of life by virtue of which communication can occur and grow. The religious protest can only become comprehensible if there is some quality of human society which is adequate to be the matrix of responsible personality per se, in contrast to some type of personality. For the important aspect of our varied social settings is that despite the differences between us as familials, nationals

¹¹This seems to be indicated by the recent work of Pablo Picasso; see his etching "Minotauremarchy" (1935) and the mural "The Destruction of Guernica" (1937).

and individuals, those societies do function to make out of all of us intelligent, self-determining, responsible persons. Our minds may differ in content, our consciences condone different activities, our freedoms be different in area--but that which makes us personal and human is the sharing of qualities of intelligence, self-determination, and conscientiousness. All human societies, despite their differences, operate to produce such personality, and all human societies are alike in being a constant threat to it.

This paradoxical state cannot be escaped, but it can be accounted for in terms of two levels of community. There is first of all a rudimentary community between men which makes the appearance of personality a possibility. There is secondly a consummatory aspect of society which is the product of human reflection and calculation. Unfortunately, the consummatory communities which men erect are constantly smashing the rudimentary basis upon which human life depends. In human experience, neither of these levels of community exists without the other, not even in the remotest primitive community. The difference between these levels is perhaps best indicated by a difference in the emotions which we feel in relation to each. As we plan the future together with "high" hopes, we are aware of the "deep" bonds between us. The contrast between rudimentary and consummatory is not the difference between primitive and civilized, nor between organic and organized. Rudimentary community already has both vitality and form before man imposes the further consummatory forms, just as a rose bush already has both vitality and form before man trains it over a trellis. This rudimentary community is a "given" in human society, though we never know it apart from some development of it. We are probably closest to it in the family, but the family in any form which we know it is not an undeveloped example of rudimentary community.

This rudimentary community as the given bond in human society is the basis for the notion of the Brotherhood of Man and is closely related to the traditional Christian notion of the Holy Spirit.¹² Paul found this spirit exemplified in Jesus and recognized that it was doing for society what he had formerly

¹²The historic relationship between the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and problems of community has been opened up by E. E. Aubrey, Man's Search for Himself (Nashville: The Cokesbury Press, 1940), pp. 114ff.

believed was accomplished by the law. The early Christians strove to inculcate in their living this spirit which they comprehended in terms of love, of mutual concern for each other. This attitude was reflected in their conception of a new covenant with God by virtue of which their responsibility toward him was no longer that of servant to master, but that which exists between friend and friend.¹³ Man was found to be living not under a Divine Imperative, but under the constraint of Christ's love.¹⁴

No organization can set out to be an unalloyed expression of the rudimentary basis of personality. The moment that human organization, even that minimum of organization effected by a single symbol, occurs, the rudimentary community has been built upon. Thus the lie is given to all organizational primitivisms, even with regard to the church. For at its origins, the Christian church was a particular expression of the rudimentary community in a specific local and temporal setting and for a particular purpose. Like all human organizations, the Christian church was brought into being by the specific wish of a group of men. What was not their doing was the creation of the impulse to organize for a particular function, an impulse born in them by contact with Jesus. The function of the church is not to be the expression of rudimentary community on earth, but to protect as best it can that communal basis of personality wherever it is threatened. Hence the church should be its own severest critic, realizing that it too is always consummatory in its structure and hence threatens the deeper bases of human personality. The great sin of the churches is to suppose that by hiding behind the notion of the Church they can escape responsibility for that strangulation of personality which they, along with all other societies, inevitably foster. It is only when the church takes a thoroughly critical and empirical attitude toward its own structure that it can truly be the instrument of continuing redemption in the world.

¹³ John 15: 15.

¹⁴ II Cor. 5: 14. Here is indicated one of our major points of disagreement with neo-orthodoxy. E. Brunner, Man in Revolt, chaps. i-iv, seems to miss the import of the shift from an old covenant to a new one. But see also his footnote, p. 259, where he speaks of the relationship between husband and wife as that of ministerium. However, Brunner does not seem to realize that throughout the New Testament, the concept of dominium is being interpreted in terms of ministerium.

The task of the church in safeguarding the bases of human life is confronted with the same difficulties which face the prophet. If it speaks at all, the church runs the risk of finding that it has thrown its support behind the existing order. Yet the church must have a speech of power for the inspiration of its members.

It has recently been recognized that human speech is of at least two kinds--designative and evocative.¹⁵ If we take this distinction seriously--and the import of semantics is that we must--we realize that religious terminology is primarily evocative and only secondarily designative. Religious terms function to evoke in individual lives that behavior which the religious group believes is best suited to attain the highest values and protect the deepest needs. But to which of the three stages of behavior is religious terminology a constraint--to action, to thought, or to attitudes? According to whichever of these phases of human life the evocative quality of religious terms applies, the idiom of the religious vocabulary will correspond.

Evocative language can use one of three forms of idiom. It may speak with the language of specific direction. It then operates without rational mediation to call out an action. But to speak thus would reduce religion to an instrument for evoking particular patterns of action which would inevitably belong to some particular culture. Secondly, religion may use the idiom of objectivity. It would then serve to call up certain patterns of thought which, by being bound to a particular cultural level of knowledge, would no more release men from their present social state than does the idiom of specific direction. The third idiom which is available is the reism which has been the truly effective verbal instrument in Christianity. A reism is to be distinguished from both a name and a fiction. A name, by referring to some object, and hence to the activities or experiences in which that object can participate, has designative reference to both reality and experience. A fiction on the other hand has only an analogical reference to both the objective and the experiential aspects of life. But a reism, while it has a designative reference to the attitudinal aspect of human experience or behavior, has only an analogical reference to reality. Whenever there has appeared

¹⁵These terms are from C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927).

a tendency for the Judeo-Christian terminology to become bound by objectification to a particular culture, there has eventually appeared an iconoclastic revolt. Iconoclasm is here meant in its widest significance as being opposition to any objectification, either material or verbal, of religious terms.¹⁶

The value of a reism is that it can be attached to religious experience to indicate the valuable attitude involved without being perverted to any erroneous objectification or by indicating any specific action. The reism can then be later used to call up that attitude, and at the same time leave the individual, or the local group, free to discover the specific form of action which, in the light of particular new needs, talents, and environment, will serve to express that attitude. The significance of religious terms, as Tillich has pointed out, seems to lie in the fact that they preserve a numinous quality in science and life despite all misuse through false objectification.¹⁷ And this numinous quality--which after all is nothing more than the fact that the religious symbol is evocative, i.e., that for every man it threatens to change his behavior on the basic level of attitudes--can be preserved because the religious term itself was never an objectification; it was a reification.

Among the important reisms of Christian thought has been the term "sin," which has been used to recall man from many illusions of the absolute adequacy of his various instruments for living. Unfortunately, human beings are fond of fooling themselves that some part of the human instrument is perfect. We need not here repeat the arguments against the competency of mind, but many Christians still need to be released from notions regarding the competency of conscience. Modern studies have conclusively proved the social origins of the conscience. The dependence of its content upon the significant symbol indicates that any particular form of the conscience is imperfect.¹⁸ But that

¹⁶There is in Christianity an "anti-defining" tradition which Thomist scholars insist on misinterpreting as "anti-intellectualism," which is a different attitude altogether.

¹⁷Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," Journal of Liberal Religion, II (1940), 28.

¹⁸H. N. and R. W. Wieman, A Normative Psychology of Religion (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., 1935), p. 254; Karl Menninger, Man Against Himself (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), pp. 51, 235-237; W. Healy, A. F. Bronner, and

does not mean that the quality of conscientiousness is futile.¹⁹ On the contrary, it is that quality which makes social reconstruction a possibility. But it is only when our consciences stand condemned of sin because of their pretensions to rightness that we understand what is really meant by hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

When used religiously, "eternity" and "infinity," like "sin," are only secondarily designative. Their primary function is to smash the boundaries of whatever time and space are for any particular individual. Time and space, experientially understood, are not what metaphysicians define them to be, but the span of time and the area of space which we have in mind as we strive to work out some particular problem. Eternity and infinity revive in us the awareness that the boundaries of our perception at any moment are finite, and that beyond them lie vast unseen consequences of our action. So understood, sin and eternity operate to produce in man an eternally begotten repentance which is the power by which he will be able to transcend the bonds with which any particular level of cultural attainment may tend to bind him.

The significance of Christian speech, an evocative language employing the reistic idiom, is that age after age it has served to recall religious individual to those attitudes which have been discovered by the prophets as capable of preserving the rudimentary basis upon which the self-determining, conscientious personality rests. That terminology has been saved time and again from misappropriation by particular cultures. Thus while it has served to create and preserve that unity of religious experience which is defineable in terms of sacrificial love, it has allowed for the greatest possible diversity of individual wish-fulfilments of that basic attitude when evoked.

A. M. Bowers, The Structure and Meaning of Psychoanalysis (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), pp. 44f.

¹⁹See the distinction between "conscience" and "conscientiousness" in John Oman, Grace and Personality, pp. 51ff., 102, 254-270, and in Oman, The Natural and the Supernatural (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), chap. xviii.

